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## MR. SMITH: A POSSIBILITY.

IMAGINE the following combination of circumstances: A man, let us call him Mr. Smith, having been brought up in orthodox Christianity has ceased to believe in the Divinity of Christ, and in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement. His attitude towards Christ as a great religious teacher we will leave for the present uncertain, but we have to assume that he retains a full belief in God and in God's rule of the world, in the possibility of communion between the finite human spirit and the infinite divine Spirit, and in the immortality of the soul.

This Mr. Smith feels the need of religious companionship, but the sense of separation between him and the believing members of his own Church is painfully strong. The familiar prayers and rites which he has known and practised from his childhood, he has not ceased to love; they are still filled for him with many holy associations and tender memories; he still recognises their nobility, and is sensible of their abiding charm, but he cannot forbear to admit that they no longer correspond with his matured convictions, and that they often are out of harmony with his conception of truth. At the cost, then, of much painful self-analysis, and at the risk of much censure and misapprehension, he is determined, hard though the struggle be and sorrowful the need, to break away from old ties and memories, and to seek a fresh religious brotherhood among new faces, with whom he may feel in closer religious sympathy and in fuller religious agreement.

To whom is he to turn? There are, so far as I know, but three courses open to him. He may ally himself with the Unitarians, or throw in his lot with the Theists; or, lastly, he may wend his way to some repre-

sentative of a still older faith—in other words, he may seek admission to the Synagogue.

Let us imagine, then, further, that, before deciding on his course of action, he determines to hear what each of these religious denominations may have to say in favour of its own particular creed. He has visited a Unitarian and a Theistic divine, and now he comes to some exponent of Judaism, and questions him as to the distinctive merits of his faith, and as to its capacity of satisfying the religious needs and aspirations of a possible neophyte.

What answer should he receive? He has knocked at the door of the Synagogue. Will it be opened? . . . .

The subject of proselytism may obviously be divided into two parts. The first is, Should Judaism desire or not desire to receive proselytes? Then, in the event of that question being answered in the affirmative, the second question is, On what grounds and by what arguments may Judaism reasonably present itself as a religion which outsiders would do well to join?

The first question, adapted to the story of Mr. Smith, comes to this: Should Judaism recommend Mr. Smith to go back to the advocate of Unitarianism or Theism, and to cast in his lot with one or other of these religious communities? Should it say to him, Judaism is a religion which is and ought to be restricted to those who have been born within its pale? No stranger by blood can enter its precincts.

Such an answer seems to me suicidal. It would definitely declare that the Jewish religion is an anachronism. I admit that this is precisely what a large number of people believe it to be, but I will not range myself with them till more conclusive proof has been adduced to this effect. If, however, Judaism is really a tribal faith, tribal in its embodiment, if not in its dogma, so that it can only be a merely family religion, suited for me and my son, and perhaps for my grandson, but not for the outsider, who nevertheless thinks as I do on

religious truth, then, indeed, it *is* an anachronism, scarcely worth preserving except in a museum of religious curiosities. The idea of a religion whose limits are bounded by, and conterminous with a race belongs to antiquity: it is out of date and out of court to-day. A religion which does not believe its own teaching truest and best for all the world is clearly a religion which has no faith in itself. And is Judaism to say to such people as I have described in the story of Mr. Smith, "You may believe our dogmas if you please, but you may not enter our brotherhood: our rites and ceremonies are not for you; you may not worship with us: you must shift for yourself, and remain in the cold; we are a people elect, and within our fold no alien may set his foot?" Religion is a phase of nationalism, then, a matter of descent, a chapter of physiology. Should we not appoint a genealogical commission, and, in the true spirit of Ezra and his associates, expel all those across whose descent the bar sinister of alien heritage can be proved to lie? And if it be that our rites and ceremonies, and the whole embodiment of our religion are so grained and interwoven with nationalism that it is hopeless to conceive that any outsider can adopt them, the time has surely come when the great object of our best endeavour, and the direct goal of all reform should be so to modify and change these rites and this embodiment that the universalist dogmas and doctrines may no longer be wedded to a tribal and national form. If our Theism is universal and world-wide, then, in God's name, let the outward manifestation not belie the inward teaching: let there be a real correspondence, a parity of range and sweep between the two. If we are to say to Mr. Smith, You had better join the Theistic Church than the Jewish Synagogue, it follows that we not only think that the religious teaching of that Church is as true and soul-satisfying as our own, but that its embodiment is a better reflection of our common faith than is the embodiment of Judaism. The Jew who says to Mr. Smith, You had better join the Theists, can have nothing

to say to his fellow Jew who proposes to join them also. If that course is better for Mr. Smith, then it is better also for him whose religious faith is identical with Mr. Smith's, and who, living in the nineteenth century, has ceased to believe in the propriety of separate religions for separate races.

I will assume, then, that when Mr. Smith pays his visit to the exponent of Judaism, he will be urged to throw in his lot with the Jews. But then comes the question : By what arguments can it be suggested that it would be better, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, to become a Jew rather than to become a Unitarian or a Theist ?

It would be impertinent to deny that the difficulties are many. It is idle to shut our eyes to the fact that our Mr. Smith, who is willing to hear the arguments of the Jew as well as those of the Theist and the Unitarian, is a hypothetical creature, at present very rarely met with in the flesh. But this is partly also due to the fact that while many people cease to be orthodox Christians in belief, the large majority continue to be orthodox Christians in practice. Nominally, at all events, they remain where the chance of birth has placed them, while practically they either take little part in the public religious life of the various Trinitarian communities, or they do not object to rites and formulas which are beautiful in themselves, and have become endeared to them by memory and association. I am not arguing against the propriety of such a course, I am merely asserting the existence of very many people who pursue it, and the truth of this assertion will hardly be denied.

Over and above this general consideration, there are doubtless other reasons which would make it probable that our Mr. Smith would have confined his inquiries to the Theist and the Unitarian, and not extended the range of his quest unto the Synagogue.

I leave entirely out of sight and unconsidered all social

and practical questions. For instance, to join a religious community, whose weekly day of rest is not Sunday, constitutes in itself a grave practical inconvenience. But we are here to consider religious difficulties and advantages only.

While we may deny that the embodiment of Judaism is necessarily, and ought to be always, of such a character as to make the religion impossible for outsiders to accept, it is clear that there is a large element of nationalism which constitutes, on the very surface of things, a real difficulty, if not an ultimate bar.

The public worship is largely conducted in a dead language, and some of the ceremonies relate to national incidents in the history of the Jewish race. Assuming, then, that there is a considerable parity of belief between liberal Judaism and Theism, why should the outsider join that particular faith where the catholic doctrine is, at all events for the present, partially clogged and obscured by national observance and embodiment?

I said *liberal* Judaism. For let us be clear and definite. Our Mr. Smith having ceased to be an orthodox Christian, cannot become an orthodox Jew. Having ceased to believe in the literal truth of the miracles of the New Testament, he has *a fortiori* ceased to believe in the miracles of the Old Testament. Why *a fortiori*? Because every one knows that in the process of disillusionment, it is the miracles of the Old Testament which are abandoned first, nor are they again accepted after the miracles of the New Testament have also been thrown by the board.

If the exponent of Judaism say to Mr. Smith, "A convert to our religion must believe in the miracles of the Old Testament but not in the miracles of the New; that Isaiah was inspired, but that Jesus was not," Mr. Smith will, politely but firmly, thank the exponent and bid him good-bye. We must assume the existence of a liberal Judaism which does not make the belief in miracles a *sine quâ non* of its teaching, and which does not limit inspiration to the

writers of a particular group of books. Of an orthodox Jew it may be truly said, as of a poet, *nascitur non fit*.

We must further assume that the teaching of liberal Judaism with regard to the existence and nature of God and his relation to the world of nature and of man, to the existence and nature of sin, to atonement and reconciliation, to social and individual ethics, and to a life beyond the grave, has been satisfactory to Mr. Smith, and in general accordance with his own personal opinions. It may be that much which he has been taught to regard as the peculiar doctrine of Jesus and of Paul, he may find enunciated by the exponent of liberal Judaism, without any reference to these two great men. Meanwhile, however, it will probably be found that the superiority of Judaism to Theism (as also to Unitarianism) will hardly lie in this, that Judaism teaches a higher and truer doctrine as to sin and atonement, or as to the relation of the individual soul to the divine Father, or that it has discovered a more accurately *juste milieu* between a one-sided doctrine of justification by faith and an equally one-sided doctrine of justification by works. The nature of its superiority must lie elsewhere.

The first argument which, as it seems to me, the exponent of Judaism, might justly use is an historical one. Theism is the creation of to-day. Judaism is the heritage of centuries. Theism has been largely attained by stripping Christianity of its distinctive doctrines, whereas Judaism even in its liberal form, represents the actual development of a living religious organism. It is surely not without a certain spiritual advantage to join a religious community with a long background of historical growth, and with a wider basis than the current opinions of isolated men. He who believes in God's rule of the world and of his spirit as operating in man, cannot fail also to believe that the great historic agencies for the production and conservation of religion in the past, fulfilled their destiny and mission through God's will, and thus, in joining

Judaism, he unites himself with such a God-willed agency for the further development and improvement of a task not yet accomplished or allocated to other hands. Our Mr. Smith, in determining to leave the fold of orthodox Christianity, can hardly *ex hypothesi* fail to admit that Judaism has a mission still, a mission which is of God.

Thus, secondly, may we not ask him to join the Synagogue, because by the truth and simplicity of its doctrines, and by its capacity for adaptation and development, it may claim to be *in posse*, though not *in esse*, the universal church of which he is in need? If he acknowledges that Judaism had a divine mission in the past, and, as the great historic bearer of Theism throughout the ages, may have a similar mission for the future, could we not urge that while Theism represents man's thoughts about God to-day, Judaism, even without miracle, represents a constant revelation from God? The private relation of each individual soul to God is independent of creed and label; but there is something more satisfying in a religion which links the present with the past, and accentuates God's part in the gradual acquisition of truth than in a religion which starts *de novo*, and seems rather the creation of man's intelligence than the outgrowth of his spiritual need. A Theism which assumes the form and maintains the title of Judaism seems still to be in the right line of development from Amos and Isaiah; while they were God's instruments as founders and creators, so may we too, the Jews of to-day, claim to be his instruments as men who develop and diffuse.

Linked in such a companionship, fired by the memory of such a past and the prospect of such a future, may not even the spiritual life of the individual be heightened and deepened by his association and partnership with the community as a whole? Theism savours of philosophy; it savours, therefore, of a noble and necessary good, but it is rather a *Weltanschauung* than a religion. If Judaism knew its duty, the necessity for Theism as an attempted religion



might gradually disappear. May Theists not justly say, "When you let us become Jews, as alone we can, we shall find our Theism again in Judaism, enriched and transfigured." Upon the basis and with the media of an historic religion, man is more calculated to realise the fulness of his spiritual capacity than by means of a philosophy or a *Weltanschauung*, however elevating and refined. This might be the third argument.

Now as regards the outward embodiment of Judaism, the really important part is the public worship of the Synagogue. The purely national festivals or fasts are, curiously enough, either non-Pentateuchal or non-Biblical, and they are gradually, but surely, dropping into desuetude and obsolescence. The Day of Memorial and the Day of Atonement are religious celebrations not more suited to one race than to another. They are, moreover, capable of being gradually charged with a fuller spiritual meaning. As I have elsewhere shown, the present Day of Atonement is something utterly different from the old *Yom ha-Kippurim*. Tabernacles is the feast which celebrates and praises God in his relation to nature and to the outer world. Pentecost, as the festival which has been traditionally interpreted to commemorate the giving of the Decalogue, symbolises that indissoluble marriage between morality and religion which Judaism may be said to have fostered and diffused. The Passover is indeed a national festival, but it may be expanded to denote the feast of human liberty and the foundation of a great religion. None of these festivals, therefore, are wholly inappropriate for outsiders, even if it were not also an obvious consideration that the children of outsiders are insiders. May not the son of a naturalised Englishman, who was once a German, be in habits, thought, manner, and patriotism, as English as the Briton of purest and bluest blood? And he who feels the force of the arguments that have just been adduced will hardly be deterred from practically applying them to his own

case, because the Liturgy has still a somewhat national tinge, and is mainly conducted in a dead language. He may even argue that an infusion of new blood might gradually set Judaism moving upon that new and greater stage of its development which seems to be the possible and glorious alternative to slow stagnation and ultimate decay.

Mr. Smith, then, might perhaps decide that a liberal Judaism would be more suited to his religious needs than the faith which is known as Theism. But he has yet another alternative; he may join the Unitarians. Such a change might be less violent, the wrench less cruel; for the Unitarians still claim the title of Christians, and Jesus is for them much more than one religious teacher among many. Indeed, if the imaginary Mr. Smith were to meet the real Dr. Martineau, can we easily imagine him going elsewhere?

It is clear that the possibility of Mr. Smith joining Judaism in preference to Unitarian Christianity depends, first, upon his own views with regard to the essential uniqueness of Jesus and his work and teaching, and secondly upon the views of liberal Judaism in regard to the same subject.

If it be true, or if Mr. Smith believes, that the religious teaching of Jesus was so new, so off the line of previous Jewish teachers, so perfect and stainless, so complete and comprehensive, that it cannot possibly be regarded as anything less than a new religion, the seceder from orthodox Trinitarian Christianity should, and must, pitch his tent within the Unitarian camp.

No full discussion of Jewish proselytism can therefore omit to include an estimate of Jesus and his teaching. At the present time, however, I am not prepared to enter upon such an inquiry. I am not, in other words, prepared to suggest what exactly the exponent of liberal Judaism should say to our supposed Mr. Smith upon this intricate and fascinating subject.

It would seem, however, that both Unitarians and

Jews may have to change their attitude. If the teaching of Jesus does not possess all the qualities just enumerated, a Unitarian Christianity seems a less defensible position than an unqualified Theism. And it may be that to certain minds it will appear that the teaching of Jesus, great and noble though it be, was neither perfect nor complete. It may be that Jesus will be seen to take his place as a great Jewish reformer, and a great Jewish teacher, but conditioned and limited by his age and his environment. It may be that his apparent claim to the office of a Messiah, or to a peculiar and unique relation to God, will be seen to rest either on the distorted interpretation of his "reporters," or on personal illusion. If conclusions such as these should be reached by any inquirers into the life and teaching of Jesus, while the old Jewish view of patronising indifference or depreciation will most certainly be modified, no reason will subsist why the men who hold these conclusions should not either remain Jews, if they are Jews, or become Jews if they are not. Some elements in the teaching of Jesus, or perhaps its very core and principle, may be recognised as vital portions of Judaism itself, and their origin or fullest enunciation in the mouth of Jesus may be freely allowed ; but, nevertheless, Jesus will find his place in the development of Judaism, and not be regarded as the founder of a new and separate religion. It will not be held necessary to accept and justify all his teaching, any more than it is now held necessary to accept and justify all the teaching of Isaiah. An eclectic procedure will be followed in either case. So far from admitting that the best elements in the teaching of Jesus are off the line of true Judaism, it will be precisely these which will be cherished and adopted as a true development, both then and now ; while that which is rejected, such as doctrines of demons and possession, and of an approach to the Father through the mediation of the Son—if indeed Jesus really taught so exclusive a theory—will be rejected both as untrue in themselves, and as alien to the genius of Judaism.

Such a compromise might prove not only a working solution of great practical moment, but also as near an approach to the truth as the nature of the subject and the resources at our command will ever allow us to attain. At all events, it might conceivably be satisfactory to Mr. Smith, who, upon the strength of it, and of the arguments outlined above, may determine for himself, and above all for his children, to find within the wide-extended portals of the Synagogue a new religious home.

C. G. MONTEFIORE.

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